

## Reflectors' Report

### EST, São Leopoldo, Brazil, November 19-23, 2015

We are gathered here from different parts of the world, over 100 women and men representing many church traditions and bringing many gifts to the consultation. We have been welcomed and hosted warmly. We shared meals, worshipped together, deliberated together, we have listened to each one and we have learned more of one another and the contexts and questions we bring. Listening to one another has enriched us and inspired us. We have been taken care and guided wonderfully by the organising committee. We are inspired and stimulated by thoughtful keynote lectures, excellent presentations and meaningful exposure to social projects. The engaged and open ways in which representatives of Brazilian churches shared about their context and witness as well as the lively worship by which the consultation was accompanied and spiritually nourished was highly appreciated. Thus the context of Latin America had a tangible impact on the consultation. Therefore we give thanks to God for an inspiring and very fruitful ecumenical consultation!

The following is a brief report of the reflectors, who were assigned to listen and harvest insights and impulses during the consultation. **The reflectors were Jerry Pillay from South Africa, Anupama Hial from India, Ioan Sauca from Romania, Ramy Farouk Hanna from Egypt, Heike Walz from Germany, Megan Baxter from South Africa, Dietrich Werner from Germany and Atola Longkumer from India.**

### General Comments:

The consultation in São Leopoldo was marked by the following dimensions:

- **“Twin”**: It was a great idea to propose it as a “twin” consultation and to have all the presentations and contributions in a “twin” methodology both in plenaries as well as in the workshops; The Twin Methodology also helped to link and compare contexts (e.g., Brazilian, Chinese, Congolese at the keynote addresses, etc.)
- **“Conceptual and practical”**: combination of lectures with an academic character with down to earth, pragmatic approaches in workshops and in visiting and being exposed to concrete projects
- **“Contextual”**: taking the consultation “out” in the regions (Latin America) and involving academic, humanitarian and development institutions in the organization and implementation of the consultation
- **“Global”**: bringing participants from all over the world, in an attempt to have a balanced participation in terms of gender, regions, lay/ordained, young
- **“Ecumenical”**: participants from Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Pentecostal Churches.

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It was very positive that so many participants were involved in the program in multiple role such as listeners, moderators, presenters, keynote speakers, reflectors, etc. This was one reason why the participants have been actively engaged in the sessions. Thus “transformative education” took place through the very process of the Consultation.

It was a very good idea to start with the social project exposure because it was important to be confronted with the vulnerable communities and the churches witness in their struggles.

The consultation has been well organised and communication has been good;

There has been a unique richness to the formal and informal interactions by the diversity of the participants. On behalf of the consultation, we express thanks and appreciation to the organisers.

While the overall organisation was excellent, there could be some improvement in terms of the preparation of the thematic track group moderators as some of the discussion in these groups could have had more focus on the assigned topics rather than broad ranging discussions.

It is appreciated that so many different Church Leaders and Theologians, Christian Social Activists and others were drawn from various parts of the world in this ecumenical gathering, which was not just about 100 people but 100 faces of different Churches! It has also become visible, that Reformation principles and dynamics are not just the property of historic mainline Reformation churches, but that social and ecclesial renewal movements in many different churches, including social movements within the Roman Catholic Church and other churches can be also regarded as a part of reformation traditions today.

It was also highly appreciated that young theologians were brought together and were recognised as vital part of the Reformation movement and resource for the continuation of the Reformation dynamic.

The report is structured under four parts, based on the four questions that serve as guide to the reflectors insights and impulses.

- 1. What were some common insights?**
- 2. What were some challenges and limitations?**
- 3. What were some missing themes, issues, realities?**
- 4. What were some major proposals that have emerged for further joint action?**

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## 1 What were some common insights?

A high commitment to Christian and theological education efforts and programs has been a characteristic feature of the reformation traditions all over the world. The impact of the Reformation has been far-reaching (e.g., education, development, democratic values, human rights and dignity, modernity/modernization, awakenings, missionary impulse).

We therefore need relevant education (Christian education, theological education and general education) to be taken more seriously as a key priority and essential component in ecumenical partnership relations between churches, in churches' priority plans and in development cooperation so as to encourage the following:

- struggle against inequalities religious intolerance respect and embracing of religious diversity and dialogue
- liberation, emancipation and prophetic witness.
- solidarity with women
- poverty human rights and human dignity
- promotion of public theology (church and theology addressing real life situations)
- Dialogue between different denominational and confessional identities which are different from context to context

The message of Martin Luther and other key figures of the historic Reformation brought light and liberation to many people. He communicated the Gospel in a way which was close to the life of ordinary peoples ( "You have to look into the mouth of the people" Martin Luther). The need for light and liberation through the Gospel is as relevant and urgently needed as ever before. We therefore have the challenge for to translate and to contextualize the theology of Reformation as a constant renewal and liberation movement for and with the people of today.

One of the key insights has been that there is a new relevance of the Reformation tradition in the context of increasing dominance and spread of violence all of the world today: The Reformation in its medieval context was about the overcoming of a system of corruption, religion of fear and a culture of violence and threat. It empowered people to liberate themselves from a religious ideology of fear, to exercise public responsibility and stewardship and to contribute to the common good. Today we need to answer the urgent question again of how to use the Reformation traditions (in theology and in action) to interrupt and overcome violence in all forms (state violence, racism, gender violence, colonial, economic violence, etc.) including violence exercised in extremist religious groups (like Boko Haram, ISIS etc.). How can we overcome obstacles that undermine interreligious dialogue and peace-building (e.g. Christian-Muslim dialogue in Nigeria)? Education plays a key role in overcoming religious extremism and violence and transforming the social milieus in which violence and aggression are born.

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Another key question is how to address the tension between Christianity historically presented as a western religion and attempts to indigenise Christianity in Asian and other non-western contexts. (e.g. Christianity in China).

We discussed situations of refugees and migrants various times. It is a challenge to analyse the reasons for migration and asylum seeking. A paradigm shift is needed as migration should not be seen as an exception but as a sort of general “human condition” for religious communities.

In addition, we realised how important processes for engendering education are for the future of Reformation and Reformation churches particularly for the contribution of women for mission and diakonia of the church.

## 2 What were some challenges and limitations?

It became clear that the intention of the twin consultation process to harvest and reflect about some of the outcomes of reformation traditions in various church contexts in the past and present and to identify their inputs and contributions to education and societal developments in different parts of the world is a significant process which goes far beyond what can be realised during just one consultation. The impact of the different forms of the Reformation movement for education, development, democratisation and modernity, dignity and human rights etc. indeed has been great!

Yet, for a credible and holistic view of the impact of the Reformation one has to make efforts to also identify the challenges, weaknesses, difficulties, hardships and wounds that reformation movements might have produced in an attempt to correct, and to find new ways towards healing and reconciliation where needed.

The following few challenges are identified:

- The attitude of self-defence against accusation, stereotyping, rejection and refusal of cooperation (in certain circles) on the side of mainline Reformation churches with the newer expressions of Christianity which also find their source of inspiration in the theology of the Reformation such as Evangelical, Pentecostal or Charismatic groups. One has the feeling at times that certain historical Churches of the Reformation behave with an attitude of “Counter Reformation” towards these new Churches.
- While affirming the great contribution of a theology which rediscovered and put in the center the importance of individual faith and salvation, one also has to be aware of some of the negative outcomes of such a theology which indirectly also encouraged the emergences of some excessive individualism and of an aggressive use of the resources for development available from this planet moving away from the emphasis on community, koinonia, interrelation and respect and care for creation. Real involvement on social

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and political transformation as an ongoing process demands from the church a critical openness also to its own limitations, shortcomings and abuses.

- While the “theology of prosperity” is rejected and criticised though it has come within the expressions of the theologies the Reformation, one has to ask the question what has brought it about and how should it be engaged in a constructive manner within the Reformation concern for good stewardship in economy in creation.

For the churches and their development and mission agencies to continue the heritage of reformation tradition they should become facilitators of the international search for a theology of life that contributes towards the realisation of the common good, welfare and justice for all. This makes it imperative that churches and agencies take the dimension of education seriously as integral part of ecumenical partnership building and project work.. This calls for prioritising and strategic financial planning for scholarship programs towards capacity building for Christian prophetic leadership development both at the regional and international levels.

Reclaiming the holistic vision of the Reformation tradition today implies also to develop an integral ministry in which preaching, diakonia, worship and community building are given equal and balanced emphasis both in the work of the church and its educational programs. Therefore the fourfold concept of ministry in the IECLB serves as a case in point to illustrate this holistic understanding of the ministry of the church today. (Pastor, deacons, catechists and missionaries).

The diminishing ecumenical commitment of historical mainline churches and ecumenical organisations in terms of their work for Christian leadership training has led to other organisations taking over initiatives but they reach only a certain spectrum (e.g. Global Christian leadership Training from Lausanne Movement).

If diplomats and CEOs are required to participate/undergo intensive leadership training to equip themselves for their tasks, why shouldn't church in the reformation tradition develop its own authentic Christian leadership training models, which might differ from the standards of business management training but are not any lesser in terms of their standard of quality, accountability and stewardship? Churches are both in need and have the potential of setting new anti-corruption standards and credibility of leadership.

### **3 What were some missing themes, issues and realities?**

A major focus was put on education but some would have liked to have more inputs and discussions on the other two aspects of 'reformation' and 'transformation' as well. Whist all of these go together it is important to unpack these other two concepts as well. People have different ideas about reformation and transformation. These need to be further explored and brought into international ecumenical dialogue. This particularly could imply deepening the understanding the concept of

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transformation both with regard to its biblical roots in the concept of metanoia (turning around, repentance, conversion) as well as to the UN concept of global social and ecological transformation which is embedded in the SDG agenda (Sustainable Development Goals).

It is suggested for a next consultation the emphasis on denominational diversity and participation is continued and even strengthened as it is extremely important to provide sufficient space for other denominations to share their journey and experiences of interaction with and refining of the reformation tradition.

It is also suggested that the four “sola” of Martin Luther, which is the most fundamental message of reformation should be more explicitly discussed and incorporated in terms of their relevance for today’s renewal and reformation movements in World Christianity ( e.g. Bible Study Movement in Brazil).

More research and attention need to be given to the huge contributions of women in the reformation traditions both in the past and the present.

#### **4 What have been or should be major proposals for joint action concerning the thematic thrust of this consultation?**

We need a new vision and engagement for Public Theology both in churches of the reformation tradition and their theological training. This implies addressing the following questions:

- -How can we be prophetic and transformative as churches together?
- -How do we bring reformation and transformation to the Church first even as we seek this in the world?
- -Is our theological education meeting the challenges of society and the world at large?
- -How can we address the issue of religious intolerance and different forms of fundamentalism?
- -What joint efforts we can engage in addressing poverty in the world?
- -What joint efforts can we engage in addressing the situation of women on broad and specific levels?
- -How do we provide more intentional listening to stories and experiences of marginalised communities from different contexts?
- -How do we engage in more joint ventures with other religious groups, actors of civil society with regard to Human Rights?
- -How do we share insights and recommendations of this Consultation and the ongoing study process on R-E-T with constituencies outside this consultation?

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Many of the historical wounds of the Reformation have been addressed and reconciliation on many of those issues has been achieved with churches within and outside the reformation tradition (Justification, relationship between faith and action as diakonia, charismatic/institutional, BEM etc). However, new splits and controversies are creeping in and dividing both the family of reformation churches as well as the wider ecumenical fellowship of Christian churches. These refer to issues of human anthropology, biblical hermeneutics and contemporary social ethics. To prevent new splits and divisions within the community of churches, new efforts for theological dialogue are needed which need to employ the same essential theological principles of reformation which include return to the biblical scripture, a concentration on what drives a community towards Christ today and a passionate concern for Christian unity. Only by this renewed reformation approach to ecumenical dialogue other newer challenges such as the ethical ones and those mentioned above can be dealt with and solved in order to advance together towards fuller Christian unity. While being aware that we are not yet in full unity, walking together in the common journey of the pilgrimage of justice and peace may discover on the way fuller unity through dialogue, exchange and cooperation.

### Suggestions for Halle

Participants to take up only one thematic track group, but then to work in four sessions so as to have more time for in depth work.

For the consultation in Halle we find it very important also to put a strong emphasis on voices from the youth.

It should also be explored whether the consultation in Halle should have more Bible Study in the morning. The approach to contextual Bible Study which has been developed in South Africa and other contexts is a key achievement of new reformation traditions from the South.

A sound theological reflection on the key theological principles of Reformation tradition will also prove helpful for Halle.

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